

POSTCOLONIAL DIMENSION IN THE POETRY OF YEATS AND IQBAL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the postcolonial dimension in the poetry of W B Yeats and M Iqbal based on theories of cultural imperialism and resistance of Edward said and Frantz Fanon. The paper tries to highlight how the imperialistic division of the world into the Orient and the Occident helps the western imperialists in stereotyping the natives by (mis)understanding and mis(representing) them in the colonial discourse. All this denigration of the history, culture and tradition of the natives is done to fabricate the myth of superior culture of the Occident. Consequently, the paper reveals the contemporary relevance of the poetry of Yeats and Iqbal in the postcolonial context as a counter-discourse to the narrative of Orientalism, Cultural Imperialism and stereotyping of the natives.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonialism, Colonialism, Orient, Occident, Resistance & Culture

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INTRODUCTION

“Postcolonial theory”, as has been well said by Dennis Walder, “is needed because of its subversive posture towards canon, in celebrating the neglected or marginalized, bringing with its particular politics, history and geography”(60). It tries to bring the voice of oppressed and marginalized to the forefront. It tries to see and analyze the colonial discourse from the viewpoint of the colonized and tries to highlight all those hidden agendas which were meant to serve the interest of colonizers. The term postcolonialism, when taken in its non-chronological, trans-historical and ideological sense, is not restricted to a particular period of time because the ‘post’ in it does not mean the same as the ‘post’ in terms like post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-feminism. In fact the term only signifies historical continuity and change. Therefore, the poets like Iqbal and Yeats who lived and died in the peak colonial era are still postcolonial in aforementioned sense of the term. According to Robert Young, “the postcolonial theory ‘threatens privilege and power’. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western culture. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well being for all human beings” (Postcolonialism short introd. p 7). The importance of this theory is self-evident in the light of the fact that the world is still reeling under the yoke of western imperialism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ania loomba draws a clear line of demarcation between imperialism and colonialism when she says that “imperialism can function without colonies (as United States of America Imperialism today) but colonialism cannot”(12). This is the main reason why the term ‘postcolonial’ is used instead of the term ‘post-Imperial’. The ultimate aim of imperialism is to drain wealth of ‘other’ people into the pockets of imperialists by exploitative means. Colonialism is only one manifestation of imperialism which was extensively used by Imperialists to

advance their own selfish interests in previous centuries. According to Macleod, “colonialism, however, is only one form of practice which evolves from the ideology of Imperialism,...”(7). These realities are well demonstrated in the works of postcolonial theorist like Edward Said.

According to Robert Young, it was the work of Edward said, namely, *Orientalism* which laid the general theoretical framework for the conceptual and discursive analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized giving rise to postcolonialism as an academic field (18). In this work Edward said has shown how the Orient is not an inert fact of nature and how various stereotypes of the natives were created and circulated by colonial agencies to offer some sort of justification for their colonial agenda. Imperialism divides the world into halves, namely, the Orient and the Occident. This division is not done on equal footing, rather, the Orient is considered to be a place of barbarism, ignorance and moral deprivation, whereas the occident is full of culture, knowledge and ethical values. Their asymmetrical relationship makes the Occident all what the Orient is not. In this way, the west projected itself as a place of human values and ethics where human evolution reached to its peak, both culturally and biologically. In sharp contrast, the Oriental people are denigrated for their ‘inferior’ culture. Orientalists do not see different things on the ground as they are not in possession of any extra-sense organ then native people; however, it is only a matter of interpretation of that observation which differentiates the two. For instance, a Muslim woman with veiled face was an object of dual interpretation. For native Muslims, she represented a value system in which her honour and dignity was directly linked to her Islamic dress code. However, for a westerner she was nothing but symbolic representation of oppression at the hands of patriarchal system. She must be freed from the tyranny. Therefore, the interpretation of the veiled women at cultural level provided some justification for intervention at political level to bring renaissance and reform in the Orient from western perspective. According to Macleod:

“It is important to grasp Said’s argument that western views of the Orient are not based on what is observed to exist in Oriental land, but often results from the west’s dream, fantasies and assumptions about what this radically different, contrasting places contains” (41).

In short, Orientalism is primarily concerned with the modes of representation and stereotyping. It projects native people as arrogant, culturally inferior and devoid of morals and ethics. Although this stereotyping is done in an imaginative way, it does not mean that it is a bunch of lies. Said is right when he says that Orientalism as a ‘system of teachable wisdom’, from the Ernest Renan (1840) till the present day in United States of America, can never be a ‘collection of lies’, rather what he tries to convey is that continuous material investment in it had made Orientalism a created body of theory and practice through which Oriental knowledge filters down into western consciousness(6). According to Macleod, “*Orientalism* may be fundamentally imaginative, but material effects result from its advent”(42).

In *Culture and Imperialism* Said tries to show how culture continues to play important role in promulgating the imperialist ideology in our contemporary world. By referring to great literary works like Conard’s *Nostromo* and *Heart of Darkness* and Bronte’s *Mansfield Park*, he highlights the role played by literary texts in promulgating the imperialist ideology either intentionally or unintentionally. The culture has the potential of becoming an imperialist tool to subjugate the natives in a more sophisticated manner. Accordingly Said highlights the role of cultural resistance in deconstructing the colonial discourses. In this context, said highlights Yeats as Poet of decolonization.

The active anti-colonial resistance put up by the native against imperialist hegemony is well demonstrated by the works of Frantz Fanon, namely, *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this work, Fanon highlights the violent nature of the

colonization and its moral bankruptcy in suppressing any voice of active resistance on the part of natives. Fanon himself being a Psychiatrist saw many instances of physical and psychological violence done to natives who showed any active form of Resistance against colonial tyranny and oppression. Rightly proclaimed as the prophet of anti-colonial violence, Fanon wants to use violence to bring decolonization because for him colonization began with and thrives on violence.

DISCUSSIONS

Geographically, despite belonging to two different continents, Ireland and India share one thing in common: the legacy of colonial exploitation at the hands of colonial Britain. The legacy of British colonialism in Ireland dates back to 1150s when Ireland was ceded to Henry II by the Pope himself (Said *Orientalism* pp. 266). The beginning of colonialism in the Indian sub-continent can be traced back in history to the arrival of Portuguese fleet on 22 May 1498 under the command of Admiral Vasco de Gama whose intention to come to India was, to seek 'Spices and Christians' (Burke and Qureshi p. 3). Thus, the history of colonialism in Ireland predates to that of India.

As is the rule in colonialism, the subjugation of these places was achieved and maintained both through physical violence and cultural intervention. In the Indian-subcontinent many wars and rebellions can be referred to which were anti-colonial in nature like the Battle of Plessey, Anglo-Mysore wars and lastly the anti-colonial revolution of 1857. Similarly, in Ireland, the course of colonialism was bloody in nature which is quite evident from the ramifications of the Rebellion of 1641, Irish Rebellion of 1798 and the Easter uprising of 1913. The cultural invasion of the Indian subcontinent and Ireland at the hands of colonial Britain is worth consideration. It was in the notorious Minute of Lord Macaulay (1835) that 'whole native literature of India and Arabia' was declared inferior to 'a single shelf of good European library'. In this way, the support for Oriental languages like Arabic and Sanskrit which were the reservoirs of native's knowledge of learning and possessing history of not less than five thousand years were declared inferior to the language of colonial Britain. Every effort was made to supplant the Oriental languages with the language of colonial Britain. This step was taken to introduce the natives to the 'superior' British culture and literature. In fact, the malicious intention of this move can be traced in the words of the Macaulay. According to him, the intention was to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Thus cultural colonization of the native psyche was deemed necessary a in the colonization of the Orient.

The cultural aggression and denigration of the native history and identity was at the heart of colonial strategy to reduce the chance of any armed or cultural resistance on the part of the natives. However, there appeared a counter-discourse to this colonial strategy both in terms of armed and cultural resistance. While the former was carried mainly by armed militant outfits and political activists, the latter became the preferred choice of resistance for writers, thinkers and poets. In the chorus of such anti-imperialist voices, the voices of Yeats and Iqbal are highly audible.

As far as the place of W B Yeats in the Club of postcolonial writers is concerned, Jahan Ramazani pleads the case like this:

"Sponsors of his membership could easily find in his curriculum vitae reasons enough to argue on his behalf. They could start by placing Yeats in the first nation to emerge from British colonial rule in the twentieth century, before the decolonization of India, Africa and the Caribbean. They could address Yeat's anti-colonial resistance to British cultural domination and his nationalist effort to transform the degraded colonial present by recuperating the pre-colonial part" (794).

If aforementioned conditions highlighted by Ramazani are the key conditions for a writer to qualify the term 'postcolonial', then Iqbal has every right to be part of such a club. Not only does he qualify the term postcolonial in this sense; rather he surpasses Yeats in many respects. Firstly, he belongs to the third world which had been reeling under the yoke of imperialism for more than 350 years and too without having such traits which are raised by the Yeats's opponents to bar him from qualifying for the term 'postcolonial'. They try to project 'his Eurocentricism, his whiteness and his affiliation with the centuries old settler community of Anglo Irish Protestants (795). These challenges are there to proclaim Yeats as 'postcolonial', however, Ramazani sees the presence of 'the necessary' though not 'the sufficient' conditions to put Yeats in the club of postcolonial (795). The eligibility for postcolonial status of Yeats, as per Ramazani, should not be seen only through the prism of 'definition' rather, sometimes revolve around 'institutional interests' (795). From the aforementioned discussion, it is very logical to conclude the postcolonial status of Iqbal for whom not only 'the necessary' rather 'the sufficient' conditions existed for his qualification to the term 'postcolonial' and this can be proven in a very discursive manner.

According to Ramazani 'many literary critics now prefer anticolonialism over post- independence or postcolonization as the defining criterion for postcoloniality (796). Talking about the overtly anti-colonial expression as a basic qualification for entering the club of postcolonial, Ramazani reveals the presence of this 'Anti-English' feeling in the later poetry of Yeats where it becomes 'increasingly pronounced' (797). However this does not mean that early poetry of Yeats was devoid of any 'anti-colonial' feeling. In fact, such a feeling is always there:

"By the age of twenty-one, Yeats has allegorized Ireland as a bleeding, rock-enchained youth in the two Twins (1886), and in the wandering of Oisín (1889) a still enchained, if now feminized Ireland is possessed by a 'demon dull and unsubduable' (797).

Another bitter aspect of the Irish subjugation by Britain is the geographical and cultural violence done to it. The cultural violence included the denigrating the Irish folklore, traditions and myths from the limelight with simultaneous foregrounding of the colonizer's culture and literature. In 1824, ordinance survey of Ireland was ordered to anglicize the native names so as to give them English identity. Moreover, the geographical boundaries were supposed to be re-drawn to prioritize the complete subjugation of land and psyche of the Irish people in a very calculated and violent manner. According to Said, "one of the first tasks of the culture of resistance was to reclaim, rename and re-inhabit the land"(cul.and Imp.p 273). If we analyze the poetry of Yeats from the resistance point of view, it has done all this. Yeats was the chief proponent of Irish Literary Revival. This revival was not meant for any art for art's sake; rather, its purpose was to rediscover and reintroduce all those myths and folktales which are the part of great Irish literary legacy so as to infuse the passion of patriotism and nationalism in the hearts and minds of Irish people, the literary revival was meant to reclaim, re-inhabit and rename the Ireland on Irish literary stage but with overt manifestations in the people's day to day lives. The reintroduction of mythical figures like *Cuchulain* was meant to give indigenious inspiration to the resistance of Irish people against the oppression and tyranny of the outside occupying force. All this revivalistic poetry is nothing but poetry of resistance in its sophisticated form. Even when Yeats is mentioning of the post office scene of the Easter rebellion he imagines the mythical Irish hero Cuchulain being summoned by the real life Irish hero Pearse as both are known for sacrificing their precious lives for a very cherished and noble cause of Ireland's emancipation from the claws of tyranny and oppression. Yeats writes:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
 What stalked through the post office? What intellect,
 What calculation, number, measurement replied?
 We Irish born into that ancient sect
 But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
 And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
 Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
 The lineaments of a plummet measured face. (Collected plays 375)

Edward Said highlights the postcolonial dimension of Yeats when he says:

“Despite Yeats’s obvious and, I would say, settled presence in Ireland, in British culture and literature, and in European modernism, he does present another fascinating aspect: that of indisputably great national poet who during a period of anti-imperialist resistance articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power” (cul.and Imp.p.265).

This anti-colonial feeling is the permanent hallmark of Iqbal’s poetry. According to Raffi-ud-din Hashemi, “the free soul of Iqbal could never reconcile with the western subjugation. His intellect could not be arrested by the shackles of slavery and soared high” (1). The free soul of Iqbal never accepted the colonial hegemony. He always propounded anti-colonial resistance which should act as the savior of mankind as a whole and should not underestimate the freedom and happiness of other people on the basis of caste, creed and colour. Although he was a little disappointed by the callous attitude of his country-men towards anti-colonial resistance; however, he was never pessimistic about the ultimate goal of decolonization. He was well-aware of the power of his ant-colonial stance. He says:

Though universe, thanks to God I murtenpress
 For bonds with celestial would that I posses
 My songs fresh zeal to hearts of men impart
 Their charm to lands that lies apart
 In Autumn to lands that lies apart
 Imbibe much joy and feel no more fortorn O God!
 To such a land I have been sent
 Where men in object bandage feel content
 (Akbar Ali 7) Kully Urdu 484)

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis done so far it can easily be concluded that the postcolonial dimension in the poetry of Yeats and Iqbal is quite discernable. Their poetry offers counter narrative to the colonial discourse. In colonial discourse the native traditions, culture, history and value system is denigrated so as to propagate 'the superior' culture of the west as tool of imperialism. Yeats and Iqbal deconstruct such notions by celebrating and commemorating the native culture on its own merits. As such the resistance dimension of their poetry in postcolonial theoretical frame work is undeniable truth of their selfless patriotism.

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